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THE
SUBSTANCE
OF A
DISCOURSE,

PREACHED AT THE
OLD MEETING-HOUSE,
BESSEL'S-GREEN,

DECEMBER 15, 1799;

OCCASIONED BY THE
DEATH OF MR. JONATHAN AGATE.

BY
BENJAMIN MARTEN. K

—————LIFE speeds away
From point to point, though *seeming* to stand still.
The cunning FUGITIVE is swift by stealth :
Too subtle is the movement to be seen ;
Yet soon MAN's hour is up, and—we are gone!

YOUNG.

—————
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[PRICE SIX-PENCE.]

THE
SUBSTANCE
OF A
DISCOURSE

PREACHED AT THE
OLD MEETING-HOUSE,
BIRMINGHAM,

ON SUNDAY 13 1793

AND OCCASIONED BY THE
DEATH OF MR. JONATHAN BOWEN



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SERMON,

Ec. Ec.

ALTHOUGH there are many subjects on which the opinions of men widely differ, yet there are others in which mankind are universally agreed. The subject I am about to discuss on the present serious occasion, I conceive to be one of this latter description. "*It is appointed unto men once to die.*" Here, the believer and the sceptic, the jew and the pagan, the mahometan and the christian, unite. The zealous defender of revelation, the frozen hearted atheist, and the bold, though misguided infidel, are here of one opinion. As this also is a subject in which all men are interested, so I am sure it demands the attention of every individual within these walls. Permit me then, my brethren, to assist your reflections on this important article,

by addressing you more particularly from those words contained in the

Seventh Chapter of the Book of Job and ninth Verse.

AS THE CLOUD IS CONSUMED AND VANISHETH AWAY; SO HE THAT GOETH DOWN TO THE GRAVE SHALL COME UP NO MORE.

As I have no desire of intruding on your time by an introduction, I shall beg leave to direct your attention immediately to the text itself, the figurative language of which will lead me to treat severally on LIFE, DEATH, and the GRAVE.

I. First I am to take notice of HUMAN LIFE, to which the text appears to have a striking reference.

When Job, in allusion to present existence, made use of the metaphor of a *cloud*, he seemed to have the same views which the apostle afterward entertained of it, when he said, "*For what is your life? It is a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.*" This figure furnishes us with ideas both of the mutability and shortness of our present existence.

As

As *the cloud*, during the time it is hovering over our hemisphere, is continually changing its position, and varying its form; equally mutable and transitory is life, made up of pains and pleasures, joys and sorrows, hopes and fears! Look at man! To-day allured with pleasure, which elevates his mind almost beyond itself, to-morrow he is bending beneath some uncommon load of anxiety; to-day elated with hope, to-morrow the slave of doubts and fears; to-day in possession of health and strength, to-morrow languishing on a bed of sickness; to-day reclining on the soft couch of ease, to-morrow torn with racking pains; to-day abounding in affluence, dressed in *purple and fine linen*, and *faring sumptuously*, to-morrow sunk on the dunghill, deprived of the common comforts of life; to-day riding in the triumphal car of prosperity, to-morrow walking through the thorny vale of adversity, the child of sorrow, disappointment, and wretchedness!

This transitory scene is likewise short and fleeting. The pious author of the text calls our life a *cloud*, no doubt in allusion to the swift and rapid manner in which that vapour is borne before the wind, when it appears for a very little time and is gone for ever! The words of the same writer are of a similar tendency, where he

says, "*Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower and is cut down, he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not in one stay.*" The good old patriarch indulged the same views of human life when he exclaimed, "*few and evil are the days of my pilgrimage.*" The longest period allotted to man here, is comparatively very short. Hence, says David, "*The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow: for it is soon cut off, and we flee away.*" But where we are permitted to see the state of hoary age reached by even one individual, crowds are called away before that period. What immense numbers die in infancy! how many in the tender state of childhood, just as reason begins to dawn in the little mind! Others in youth, in full pursuit of science, or labouring to acquire the necessary pre-requisites to some useful occupation, the hope of the father and the mother's care, in this promising moment are taken to the silent grave! Some, like the deceased, arrived to manhood, who having by education and diligence acquired the means of living, and about to launch into the more important spheres of life, are at this hopeful period called by death, and laid inactive in the grave! Others we observe

serve with families around them, applying the advantages and profits of their business to the necessary work of education, and forming the tender mind for usefulness, are taken away, and and leave that unfinished which they so eagerly began! Some there are, who having passed this state, are busily engaged in settling an expensive family in life, perhaps already gone half way through the long anticipated work, when summoned by death to a world of spirits; whilst others, but alas how few! permitted to pass on to old age, reaching even sixty or seventy years. All these circumstances teach us the mutable and fleeting nature of life. They illustrate the propriety of the metaphor in the text—for our life varies like the changing cloud, and passeth away like the fleeting shadow!

II. I am next to treat on DEATH, which is represented by the cloud *consuming* and *vanishing* away.

It is, my friends, a question no less awful than it is important—*What is it TO DIE?* In return I might briefly answer in the words of Dr. Young, alluding to the worth of time, "*Ask death beds, THEY can tell!*" For though we may meet with some striking representations from the pulpit and
from

from books, yet surely this awful lesson is best taught, and of course soonest learnt, in the chamber of mortality. The death-bed of our dearest friends, the sighs and groans, the tossings too and fro, the wishful looks, and the last-long farewell, will impart ideas not to be derived from any other quarter. If we will take pains to look full into the subject (and indeed on occasions like the present who could avoid it) DEATH will appear very awful and alarming, from various considerations.

Wherever death prevails, it produces a most cruel revolution in this our mortal system. Observe the language of inspiration on this head: "*Thou changeest his countenance and sendest him away.*" — "*The grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth away.*" Yes, Sirs, the glowing cheek turns pale, the rolling eye sinks in its socket, the nimble tongue lies silent, the active hands and feet are motionless in the coffin, and the healthful body, now a breathless corpse, is about to be consigned over to the silent grave!

There is no situation so exalted, nor a condition so abject, as to exempt man from the dominion of death. The high and the low, the rich and the poor, the young and the old, the
bond

bond and the free, the noble and the ignoble, the learned and the illiterate, lords and slaves, princes and peasants, are equally subject to his control. The man of honour, the man of pleasure, the sordid miser and the debauched prodigal, the man of business and the man of religion, are alike exposed to the shafts of death ! Hence, therefore, says the poet,

“ Death who comes to one, will come to all.”

Wherever death prevails, the strongest ties of nature, of friendship, and of religion, are loosened ; the mother's shrieks, the infant's cries, the husband's sighs, and the wife's lamentations, are of no avail ! The parent is snatched from the child, and the child is torn from the embraces of the disconsolate parent ; the husband is taken from the wife, and the wife separated from the arms of the distressed husband. Surely these mortifying circumstances should teach us to moderate our earthly attachments ! “ What,” says the tender mother, “ can I love my child too much ? Cruel thought ! ” My dear friends, I would by no means check your growing joys, nor damp the ardour of your affection ; I merely suggest, that death lurks unseen behind you. Prepare yourself then, for peradventure the
darling

darling of your heart may be taken from you. Well did the Apostle exhort the primitive Christians, "*Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.*" Nothing, indeed, but sin can deprive us of those divine realities, while death, that relentless tyrant, in a moment strips us of all our most desirable objects on earth.

What tends to make death still more awful is, the sudden and unexpected manner in which he sometimes executes his summons. Hence, observes the pious author of the text, "*one dies in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet.*" How many poor mortals are taken off in an unguarded moment! See them entering an eternal world, with their sins and unrepented follies on their heads, amidst the bustle of business, in the full career of life, possessing health and strength, calculating on their profits or exulting in their worldly prospects, saying to their hearts each for himself, "*Take thine ease; eat, drink, and be merry!*" Others busied in midnight revellings, spending that portion of time in dissipation, which nature has appointed for refreshment, are called into eternity before another rising sun! We see one plunging into the flood, another falling a victim to the flames; one dies in his house, another drops by the way; the former, perhaps, while

while partaking of his wonted meal, falls from his chair, and sinks into eternity ! Surely then it may be justly said of man, that "*in the midst of life he is in death.*" Upon this consideration our Lord's words to his disciples must acquire an additional force, "*WATCH, for ye know not the time when the Son of Man cometh !*"

III. I come next to treat on the GRAVE, "*So he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more.*"

The GRAVE in scripture is emphatically said to be *the house appointed for all living*. This declaration affords us serious ground of consideration. Yes, Sirs, we must one day be consigned to those gloomy mansions over which the king of terrors holds his long and silent dominion. A shroud must be our garment, a coffin our habitation, and this healthful air, with which we are now surrounded, must be exchanged for the region of dust and putrefaction ! This is the awful language of scripture, "*They shall lay down alike in the grave, and the worms shall cover them.*"

It is understood that the GRAVE will be a place of rest and of exemption from trouble : "*There the wicked cease from troubling, there the weary*

weary shall be at rest." Although death be the effect of sin, yet the mortal enjoys a respite from distress, so long as it continues a tenant of the gloomy mansion. Are you harassed with worldly anxieties? Are you weary of your earthly pilgrimage? The period is but short, your race will soon be run, your battle will soon be fought, your journey ended. Death closes the scene, and lodges the traveller in the peaceful tomb, where the din of war, the downfall of states, the overthrow of kingdoms, or the convulsions of empires, can never reach him to disturb his profound tranquillity!

The grave is also a place of total inactivity and of forgetfulness. Solomon assures us that there is *no device, work, wisdom, or knowledge* in that solitary recess! Awful and tremendous consideration! Hear then and learn from our blessed Lord a lesson of wisdom. "*I must do the work of him that hath sent me while it is day.*" Surely if our trial closes with our present existence, it is our wisdom eagerly to embrace, and diligently to improve present opportunities. "*Behold! now is the accepted time; behold! now is the day of salvation.*"

But

But what we ought principally to notice, is the expression in the text "*shall come up no more.*" How hard is our fate here represented; the dearest friends can meet no more; ye parents, your children shall not return to you, but you must follow them! It might be here observed, that these words of Job are not to be taken without some restriction. His meaning was evidently, that when once the poor mortal is cut off by death, and laid in the silent grave, he can never resume his former sphere of action; for it cannot be supposed that Job, whose expectations of a future state were so sanguine, could intend to convey any other meaning by the words of the text. You remember his expressions, "*Though after death worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.*" David likewise declares, "*my flesh shall rest in hope.*" In the same sense we understand the words of Solomon on the same subject, when he says, "*there is no discharge in this war.*" The state in which death leaves us must for a time remain unalterable. The noise of fame, the pomp of riches, the allurements of pleasure, the charms of music, the efficacy of medicine, and the aids of philosophy, are of no avail; intombed in dust no human power can affect us!

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As

As death will close the busy scenes of life, so the GRAVE is the prison into which the mortal victim is thrown. Here it must remain, until HE who hath power over death shall come, and with a voice louder than ten thousand thunders, pierce those silent caverns, burst the iron bars, and call the prisoners forth! *Life and immortality* are indeed brought to light by the Gospel. Thence we learn, that although we die, the period shall arrive when we shall shake off the dishonours of the tomb, and be made the subjects of an immortal existence. “*For this mortal shall put on immortality, and this corruptible shall put on incorruption, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory!*”

This part of my subject lays open before me a delightful and extensive field, into which I should gladly have entered, but time obliges me to draw towards a conclusion.

It is common on these occasions to say something of the character of the deceased, but this part I generally decline. It frequently happens that we are not sufficiently acquainted with the character we are called upon to delineate; we have known bad characters misunderstood, and good ones,

ones, by overstrained encomiums, are often held up to derision. The best use we can make of the memory of our departed friends is, studiously to avoid what we saw amiss, and zealously to imitate what we beheld praiseworthy. Let us, however, be particularly careful to judge of them according to the pure law of charity, recollecting, that as we judge here, so we shall be judged hereafter. But I cannot dismiss this subject without suggesting a few words to surviving relatives.

First to you the *parent of the deceased*, would I address myself. My dear Madam, if I knew less of you, it might be necessary for me to say more to you on the present occasion. Through Providence, you have been of late years placed at a considerable distance from your children, but still I know they are ever near your heart, and your mind is burdened with an incessant solicitude for their welfare. One of them is no more! You have in times past gone through many scenes, this is a trying one; but I forbear to open afresh the wounds of a heart ever exposed to the nicest feelings of sensibility. I would rather pour in the rich balm of consolation. You have felt as a parent, I am sure you also feel as a christian. If any thing can compensate the loss

of a child, it must be the joyful expectation of meeting him again in a better world; be this pleasing satisfaction *yours*, when you call to remembrance a child, whom you can never see again this side the grave.

Secondly, I would address myself to you also, the surviving *brothers* and *sisters of the deceased*. My dear friends, you have lost a brother. He who the other day lived among you, and with whom you were on many accounts closely connected, is taken from you, enclosed in a coffin, and his accounts are sealed up unto the judgment of the great day! The end which Providence had in view, by this untimely stroke, it is not for me to determine; but *this* we know, that sanctified afflictions are blessings in disguise. God grant that the present circumstance may be made effectual to this desirable purpose. Let this solemn event prove a warning to the living. You know, my friends, we often wander in our imaginations, forget our God, and are thoughtless of our latter end. Fed by the divine bounties, we forget the hand whence our blessings flow. You recollect the words of David, "*Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word.*" God alone knows what effect this awful scene may produce on your minds.

May

May it excite you to diligence, enflame your zeal for religion, and *so teach you to number your days*, that you may with renewed solicitude apply *your hearts to the acquisition of true wisdom*. Methinks I hear your poor brother now locked up in the arms of death, exclaim, "*Weep not for me, but for yourselves. My battle is fought, my race is run, my fun is set.* Be diligent, improve the few fleeting days which you shall be permitted to enjoy on earth, for your time is wasting away; your life, like the flying cloud, will soon be gone for ever!"

Finally, to each and to all of you, my friends, the deceased has afforded a warning of your latter end. This is only a repetition of that awful declaration which God made when he said to Adam, "*Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.*" This breathless corps now lying before you, proclaims in words of irresistible eloquence, YE ARE MORTAL DYING CREATURES! Who will follow next, God knows. You are, perhaps, some of you, making the enquiry, "*Is it I?*" Should you not also ask, provided it be ME, *am I prepared?* You will do well never to lose sight of this enquiry, until you can answer it to your own satisfaction. It was the observation
of

of an Apostle, "*Beloved, if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.*"

To assist you in these important concerns was the design of the present discourse. If in the smallest degree it shall be found to accomplish this end, I shall esteem myself amply compensated for the pains, (however small) which I have taken. I call upon you, both young and old, men and women, never to trifle with your happiness, by putting death far from you. If you have been inattentive to your best interests, if religion has not hitherto sufficiently occupied your minds, make application while it is called to-day to the GOSPEL; accept the gracious overtures of a dying Saviour; seek an interest in redeeming love. You are informed that the arms of benevolence are open to receive you, provision is made in the Gospel, and the strongest invitations are given; but remember, *the day of grace* will not last for ever. When your Lord comes a *second time without sin unto salvation*, he will assume a different capacity, he will then come not to call sinners to repentance, but to receive their assigned punishment. Finally, as life is so exceedingly short and uncertain, and as so much depends on our conduct in this transitory state, may it be your wisdom and mine, to keep
our

our lamps trimmed, and our lights burning!
Thus will death be disarmed of his sting, and
appear no more than a desirable messenger, sent
to introduce us from this short-lived changing
world, into a state of pure and endless felicity.

FINIS.

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[91]

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AN
ADDRESS

TO
YOUNG PEOPLE,

ON THE
NECESSITY AND IMPORTANCE



RELIGION.

BY
JOHN EVANS, A.M.

Master of a Seminary for a Limited Number of Pupils, Pullin's Row,
Islington.

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